



Local experts discuss region's future water supply

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In the San Diego County Water Authority's second "Water Talks" community forum Tuesday night local experts discussed some of the challenges the region faces in the next decade.

The Water Authority shared what the government body is doing to improve and prepare for the coming demand as San Diego County's population is forecasted to grow. The public was invited to the event and was encouraged to ask questions after the end of the presentations.

Three San Diego water officials joined Water Authority Board Chair Michael T. Hogan and the North County Chamber of Commerce to discuss existing water supplies and proposed future water supplies, including indirect potable reuse— known by many for the "toilet to tap" mantra— and sea water desalination.

Water Authority Water Resources Manager Toby Roy discussed and illustrated via Power Point where San Diego's water supplies originate and the issues involved with each source. While most of the region's water comes from the Colorado River and Northern California's Sacramento and San Joaquin Delta, new sources of water include tapped groundwater, recycled water and water derived from sea water desalination plants.

Roy broke down San Diego's water supply into two parts: local and imported. Local water supply comes from sources within San Diego County, while imported comes from places like Arizona and Northern California.

A challenge with imported supply is the rising cost.

One of the cheaper supplies off the Colorado River is growing in demand and northern California supplies are becoming a lot more expensive due to needed repairs to the level systems, which in some locations are over 100 years old, said Roy.

In the next 10 years, the price lines of new water supply and older water supply will cross, said Roy.

City of San Diego Principal Water Resources Specialist Cathy Pieroni illustrated recent developments with the city of San Diego's water-recycling program. Even though the recycling program may be expensive to operate, the city may save in the long run.

"Our imported water options are going to become more expensive, and so if we look at a \$2,000 threshold, it could be \$2,000 and be cost effective," said Pieroni. "We already have seen our imported water rates, basically, double over the last 10 years and continue to be more expensive...This is a good time to evaluate the affordability of this project."

The San Diego water-recycling program, which is similar to a system currently in use in Orange County, is in its testing stage.

The evening's last speaker, Water Authority Water Resources Manager Bob Yamada, broke down the process of desalination and illustrated three proposed desalination projects in and around San Diego County.

“The cost of sea water desalination is in the similar cost line with other local water supply,” said Yamada. Yamada is quick to say that sea water desalination also would fit best due to San Diego’s location near the coast and may meet San Diego County’s water needs.

“It’s a high reliability, and it’s a potentially high volume supply, “ he said. “In comparison to ground water, which we are limited in how much water we can actually get out of the ground or water basin here in San Diego County, we can get some very high volumes of water from these desalinations.”

The three projects mentioned in his presentation include a site in Carlsbad near the Encinitas power plant, a site within the boundaries of Camp Pendleton and a site located in Rosarito Beach, a Mexican town located 20-miles south of the border.